Wildlife Habitat Management for Small Woodlots

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Habitat

All resources needed for survival and reproduction

- Food
- Cover
- Water
- Breeding locations
- Space
Habitat Management

• Manipulate habitat to initiate a change in wildlife behavior and population size

• “If you build it, they will come”

• Maybe…

• If they exist, can find it, etc.
Starting Points

• What do you want? – what type(s) of wildlife, how many?

• What do you have? – size of property, current wildlife species

• What is in surrounding landscape? – species, habitat types

• Start with small habitat improvement projects and build gradually

• Use available resources – stewardship programs, cost-share
Consider landscape context
Habitat

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- Food
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- Breeding locations
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Feeding Wildlife
Food plots

- Expensive and often unnecessary?

- Should be small (¼ - 5 acres)

- Maximize edge around the plots

- Clover, lespedeza, sorghum, wheat
Food and Cover with bare ground interspersed to allow for movement of smaller species

Mix of forbs, grasses, and open areas
Plant grains near cover.
Leave standing.
Encourage shrubs that produce berries & fruit for cover and food
Trees and Shrubs

Mast Trees

Oak, Hickory, Beech, Walnut

Fruit-producing Trees and Shrubs

Dogwood, Elderberry, Spicebush, Serviceberry, Persimmon, Chokecherry
Cover

- Shelter from weather
- Denning and nesting
- Hiding cover
- Escape cover
Importance of stand structure
Conifers provide good thermal cover.
Coarse woody debris

Fallen trees and branches provide cover for wildlife
Provide Nesting Habitat

Leave Snags and Cavity Trees

Artificial Nest Boxes / Platforms

Ground Cover
Snags and Cavity Trees

- Foraging, perches, cover, nesting and denning sites
- Retain a variety of different-sized trees
- Hardwoods last the longest, but some species need softwoods
- Make snags?
Provide travel corridors
Water
Protect vernal pools
Protect riparian buffers for water and cover
Successional Stages

Stage 1 = Bare ground
Stage 2 = Annual grasses
Stage 3 = Perennial grasses and forbs
Stage 4 = Shrubs
Stage 5 = Young forests
Stage 6 = Mature forests
Many wildlife species utilize multiple successional stages.
In general, if you…

Maximize habitat heterogeneity

You will…

Maximize wildlife species diversity
Abrupt “sharp” edges Offer very little cover
Gradual “soft” edge provides more food and cover for more species
Consequences of increased edge

- May increase edge predation and parasitism
- Decrease in habitat for forest interior species (e.g., squirrels, some songbirds)
- May encourage invasive plant species
Let's cut him in half and count his rings!

Nawww... Let's drive holes in him and drain the sap!

Turn him into pulp, if you want my opinion.

Limb him!

Forest violence
Thinning promotes growth of understory which provides cover, nest sites, and food.
Logging Roads

- Seeding reduces erosion and can serve as food plots
- Often used as travel corridors for wildlife
Clearcuts

Create several small clear-cuts over a period of time

Irregularly shaped or strips (creates more edge)
Small, irregularly shaped clearcuts create more edge and interspersion than large rectangular clearcuts.
Clearcuts look devastating but provide habitat for many wildlife species.
Regrowth following a clearcut
Regeneration of many species creates interspersion, cover and wildlife foods
Five years following a clearcut - Thick cover and lots of food.
20 years following a clearcut: Healthy, mature trees with understory for cover
Summary

Provide food, cover, & water
Variety of habitat = Variety of wildlife
Provide edge, interior and interspersion
Avoid impacting large areas all at once
Manage with consideration of the landscape context
Good luck!